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## FOOLISH INTELLIGENCE

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The intelligence community should brace itself for a new wave of castigation that widens its past sea of woes. The looming storm will arise from accusations that it inadequately warned the United States of Soviet military capabilities and technological breakthroughs during the 1970s and early 1980s. These inevitable accusations, originating from the center-right, will diffuse throughout the body politic and will focus on the competence of American intelligence analysis. For the Central Intelligence Agency elite—those in the Operations Directorate—has catered for years to America's foreign policy establishment view that the biggest game in town is at least collaboration and at most condominium with Russia. This has led to a process of discounting data that portray the Soviet Union as a genuine threat rather than as a potential partner.

Past hubris has brought on present nemesis. The CIA's (and military intelligence's) attempts at political assassinations, covert shenanigans, illegal spying on American citizens, and free-wheeling operations have reaped their reprisals. The now receding accusations, originating from the center-left, focused on these intelligence excesses. As a result, the reins of the covert operators were pulled in, as the five-year-old investigations and presidential Executive Orders scaled down the CIA's activities.

The limitations were perhaps overdue, though the fanfare was overblown. The CIA was never as nefarious as strident critics con-

tend, and few of its members indulged in offensive deportment. Even if every official investigated for illegal practices were found guilty, the culprits would still add up to a tiny percentage of all intelligence personnel. Executive and congressional investigators have highlighted the sensational at the expense of the more significant.

President Carter aimed at the right target—inadequate performance rather than overzealousness—on Armistice Day 1978, when he fired off a handwritten memo to his top security advisers. It opened pungently, "I am not satisfied with the quality of political intelligence." The president was justifiably distraught by the crumbling of the shah's reign in Iran. He resented that American intelligence officers, long stationed in Tehran, had failed to tell him what General Ludendorff told the kaiser after a brief visit with the Austrian army on the eve of World War I: "We are allied to a corpse."

The much touted intelligence failure in Iran was due to a massive failure of imagination. Similar human frailty led the British ambassador in Berlin, two days before the onset of World War I, to report that war was out of the question. The syndrome also afflicted American leaders on the eve of Pearl Harbor, Stalin at the outset of Operation Barbarossa (Hitler's 1941 invasion of Russia), and the Israelis immediately before the 1973 Yom Kippur war—the three most celebrated intelligence failures of recent times.

But no such failure of imagination can account for staggering CIA errors, compounded over 15 years, in estimating Soviet forces and intentions in strategic weaponry and overall military effort. Beginning in the 1960s, the CIA embarked upon a consistent underestimation of the Soviet ICBM buildup, missing the mark by wide margins; its estimates became progressively worse, on the low side. In the mid-1970s the intelligence community underestimated the scale and effectiveness of the Soviets' multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV) programs. Even more important, Soviet war-

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